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the latter... We are familiar enough with the Bambara agricultural customs, but none of them would have brought about the spread of the balanzas, their regular spacing in the fields, and their protection from goats. In almost all the cases we have observed, the balanzas are of considerable age, development and density. There lies in this subject a fine dissertation topic for a young ethnographer and naturalist." (pp. 135, 136).

The myths of the Bambara answer M. Roberty's questions.

/39/ Mousso Koroni

776 Mousso Koroni is the impure earth; she symbolizes all that is opposed to light: darkness, night, witchcraft. She is also the symbol of rebellion, disorder, and impurity. Pemba pursued her in vain in his effort to take back what he had given her: the "words" she had received from him were divulged to men in spite of him.

Although no cult honors her and no sacrifice is offered her, her name is cited in various ceremonies and mentioned in the chants; her actions are recalled by certain gestures in the ritual.

776 304 On the other hand, she is the initiator of the separation of the sexes realized in the human body by the removal of the foreskin and the clitoris, an operation which after her betrayal, she performed on all those she met. In this way, she placed them in the same state of rupture in which she found herself: a female principle as opposed to Pemba, the male principle. In addition, she is present in every human being in the form of an evil force, the wanzo, which she had communicated to all those she approached, and of which one must rid oneself through the methods she herself inaugurated: circumcision and excision (1).

1. See p. 95.

776 241 Mousso Koroni is also the originator of certain agricultural techniques which she taught men, and every year, in certain villages, she

The wanzo

778 The wanzo, an evil force created in the beginning by Mousso
304 Koroni's impurity, was caused by the curse, of which she was the object after her betrayal, and which she communicated to the earth during her underground journey. After she had maimed herself on Pemba while having sexual relations with him, her jealousy pushed her into avenging herself on the women who mated with the balanza. Her madness and despair prompted her to pursue her betrayal to the very end. With nails and teeth she excised and circumcised the men and women she met during her travels. The wanzo she carried about thus penetrated the human species, making the operation necessary for all those to follow. Faro could not remedy this, but his protection is invoked for each child during the operation. The headdress of the circumcised symbolizes the sky and the purifying light.

At birth, each child receives the wanzo, "the word of Mousso Koroni," in its blood and on its skin at the moment of contact with the earth on which it is born. This force, also called kono nyama, "the nyama of the inside," is not to be confused with the tere but is of the same nature and is transmitted to everything the bearer touches. [826] Its seat is mostly in the foreskin of the man and the clitoris of the woman, and it represents the disorder in the individual: "it makes man such that he can live with no one, can stand no one, and cannot stand himself." In addition, it is opposed to fertility.

In order to become a stable individual, to marry, procreate, and to sacrifice, the child must be rid of his wanzo. This is achieved in the course of circumcision or excision and in the rituals that end the seclusion of those operated upon. The greatest part of its force runs into the earth with the blood of the mutilated organ. The rest of it escapes with the smoke of the fire over which the children jump (three or four times according to their sex) before returning to their homes. The act of abandoning their /65/ old clothes and putting on new ones at that time confirms their new status. But the wanzo does not disappear; it is channeled into the masks of the ndomo society to which the uncircumcised belong (1). Similarly, when a child dies before being

1. See p. 222.

circumcised, appropriate rituals have the effect of channeling the

778 wanzo and directing it into the mask to prevent it from doing harm
304 (1). Thus, nothing of the individual forces is lost. The wanzo itself,

1. See p. 256.

harmful at the beginning, when properly channeled and directed, serves to consolidate the collective energies of the infantile societies based on it.

Only when an adolescent has lost his wanzo is he permitted to marry;
[582] any individual would refuse to marry a partner who is not completely rid of it.

The Body

826 The Bambara have a notion of their bodies and the role of the different parts and organs. This notion is all the deeper because it is linked to that of the spiritual principles that animate it.

Indeed, the tere is determined by certain visible aspects of the body, while the ni and the dya also have sexes like the body. Therefore any study should include the links that unite the spiritual elements to the physical body in order to understand properly its state and function.

Blood, which together with breath is the seat of life, is also the vehicle of physical and spiritual forces that circulate with it in the veins and arteries. The blood sacrifice liberates these forces which sustain the altars, the soil, and the beings who receive them. Certain alliances are consecrated by an exchange of blood. The clear color of blood is proof of its purity: all infractions bring about a
[841] change and cause it to become pale. Menstrual blood, testimony to Mousso Koroni's impurity and of the momentary sterility of women, is the principal taboo of the supernatural powers that create and protect life.

826 The head, which contains thought, is an essential part of the in-
828 dividual and his symbol: "the head of the members of society" is
827 represented by a stroke in the course of the rituals performed by members of the Komo or the Kworé. Man grows through his head just as a plant "grows through its head bud" (2). Man's head is protected

2. The myth mentions the "head of the balanza" at the time that men broke the

826 is also through the feet that a part of man's strength is deposited in the sweepings and rubbish upon which he treads. Their role as receptacles appears in the rituals concerning household refuse and the dirt on roads and paths.

Like the little finger, the small toe symbolizes the whole person. [301] It is sometimes adorned with a silver ring, symbol of the word, which recalls that man's body is the seat of the word extended within him from head to feet (1).

1. In olden times the ring on the small toe was made of red nyama fiber (nyama fu), which played the same role as metal.

831 The notion of the bisexuality of human beings is fundamental:
826 the spiritual principles are sexed like the body, whose ambivalence /71/ is evident during childhood: the boy is feminine in his foreskin; the girl is masculine in her clitoris. One of the aims of circumcision [304] and excision is to help the child attain the sex to which it is apparently destined by removing the organ of the opposite sex. (2) But the

[171] 2. The same conception is found among the Dogon; see M. Griaule, Dieu d'eau, p. 185.

initial duality of the soul and body is the very foundation of the human being. He is complete only if he originally received it, and he retains it even after the operation imposed by physical and social life, [774] for the soul of the opposite sex, though diminished in the body, remains present in the shadow, the dya. He also rediscovers his dual unity when he marries. A married couple are a unit for their dya [581] join as do their bodies in an act which is not merely physical and which realizes the ideal union of twins.

831 The sex to which one belongs dominates one's whole existence on
801 earth. Objects and tools bear masculine or feminine marks, according to the rules of the division of labor. The numbers three (man) and four (woman) are abridged forms of the sex. "Primitive men" who, according to the Bambara expressed themselves mostly by gestures and signs, engraved their rare objects with the number of

845 Up to the time they are twelve, the children bathe themselves preferably in the Niger. They supposedly can walk on water and never run the risk of drowning.

The twins do not become separated from each other any more than the dya is separated from the living being to which it is attached. They wear the same clothes and eat the same food simultaneously. Formerly male twins married the same woman. If one of them dies 845 at an early age, the blacksmith carves a small wooden doll called 778 flanitokele, which takes the name of the deceased and which the mother puts on the mat next to the living child. The latter takes this doll with him at the time of his circumcision and keeps it during the period of his seclusion in order to bring it back to the parental home whence it is never removed. When he marries, he sticks the doll into the earth along with another piece of wood symbolizing the wife of the deceased. Since twins are in a sense a living replica of Faro, none can bother them without showing disrespect to him. On the other hand, they are the object of attention and precaution on the part of their family as well as their neighbors. Their presence is always beneficial. Considered invulnerable, twins used to march ahead of [728] troups in times of war and would serve as inviolable intermediaries between the warring parties during truce.

The Hermaphrodite

826 The hermaphrodite, being both male and female, is to all extent and purpose his own twin. Consequently, he has no dya (1).

[825 304] 1. The hyena is considered a hermaphrodite; it can engender or conceive, depending on its size and strength, "the stronger impregnating the weaker." A tattooing system is based upon this belief.

/88/ The Albino

[143] Albinos of light or reddish skin and red hair are called gombele or yepege, this latter term being reserved for those who show the most accentuated characteristics.

826 833 The albino is supposedly born of sexual relations which took place in the middle of the day when the sun is in the koblenkaba, sky of

826 Faro's wrath—a fact which constitutes a serious breaking of taboo.
[833] The consequence of this is to coalesce in the maternal womb the twins originally granted to the woman by Faro and to decolorize the skin of the being thus formed. Because of this fact, the albino, the embodiment of twins, does not inherit the spiritual princples of a deceased person and is also a new being given to men by Faro. But the impurity he has acquired increases tenfold his tere and his wanzo,
[304] which are so active that the circumciser must sacrifice on his own personal altars before performing the operation. From the ambivalence of the albino, originally of the same essence as Faro but fallen because of the impurity transmitted by his parents, stem various customs and representations. (1).

1. This ambivalence is also at the root of the belief that the albino is a being formerly provided with wings and able to fly (see p. 68, a quality he lost after his contact with the impure soil.

826 His body is believed to be endowed with special powers. The per-
718 son who owns his skull will have a numerous family and prosperity; his hair brings wealth; the marrow of his bones provides gold and copper. If he is made to sit at a place where bones are buried, whatever one asks for is granted. His excrements, mixed with seed, have the effect of increasing the harvest for the year.

826 Because of the value attributed to the albino he is a choice victim
782 for the sacrifices to Faro. His nyama is such that he can be sacrificed without prayer, the act itself constituting an efficacious invocation. Lacking living albinos, men often tried to appropriate the remains of a buried body.

/89/ Chapter 4

SACRIFICE AND THE ALTAR

782 To call upon spiritual forces and to influence them, the Bambara use prayer, offering and sacrifice. They perform oral and manual

564 Every blacksmith is regarded as the holder of an excellent tere.
326 He is well-intentioned, affable, and never hurts anyone. It is easy
774 to make friends with him, to joke with him, even if one knows him but a short time. The senankuya relationships which he has with other Blacks also contribute to the cordiality of these ties.

[304] The good tere of the blacksmith is brought into play particularly at circumcision which is preferably entrusted to a Gwonna. Being circumcised by a blacksmith causes the wanzo to diminish rapidly, hastens the healing, and improves the tere. A blacksmith is reputed to have the power of transforming himself at will into an animal or a plant. In those places where hyenas are venerated as the animal [825] protectors of a village (dasiri), they are always considered as the blacksmith's ancestors who have undergone metamorphosis. (1).

1. Particularly in the village of Konodimi, situated 21 km. to the southwest of Ségou.

773 The ritual paraphernalia now preserved in each village comprise
564 models of all the tools manufactured by the blacksmiths since their
326 first appearance.
412 a. Wooden tools The craftsmen first used wood, gradually changing the shape of the objects. From a simple stick /116/ (generally in sunzun) (2) or from a rough-hewn block, they gradually made more

2. Diospyros mespiliformis. The wood of this tree is very hard.

perfect tools, obtaining the shape desired by rubbing and polishing on rocks.

773 The first weapon used in hunting was a throwing instrument in the
564 shape of a boar-spear, the semenkala (from kala, handle, Fig. 9, A).
326 Hewn from one piece, it comprised three distinct parts: (1) the
411 bulonda; (2) the semenu; and (3) the koli (literally, hook). Men threw the object with all their strength at the pursued animal or else they dug into the earth where their prey was hiding with the pointed end (semena) which was often poisoned with a viper's venom. The weapon was the object of blood sacrifices carried out on the koli and destined to increase its strength.

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[561] the society during a public consecration which she receives with several others, the group forming an age grade.

After an apprenticeship of seven days, the potters decide upon the date of the ceremony which is celebrated at the firing spot near the altars. Each member provides a hairpin (bandigi), which represents her on this occasion, and the skin of a hedgehog. Disrobed in front of the assembled villages, each girl is seated in turn on the altar as an aged woman examines her genitals to verify her virginity and the proper execution of the excision.

[831] /126/ If the young girl is no longer a virgin, she is publicly declared dangadè (literally, bastard) and finds herself automatically excluded from the society; she will never be able to receive the potter's title. Otherwise, a proclamation is made immediately to the great joy of the public. If the excision has not been judged [304] sufficient, the patient is given the title of potter after having submitted to a new operation performed in such a way that the blood runs over the pottery (1).

1. If excision is not possible, the operation takes the form of a wound inflicted with the hedgehog's skin (see p. 243).

575 An old woman then appears seated before members of the age grade
323 and instructs them. She tells of the origin and history of pottery,
867 apprising them of the difficulties of the craft such as fatigue, burns, etc. She teaches them patience towards the client and enumerates the rules which will have to be observed during their lifetime: to be pure in heart and to hate no one; not to undertake work shortly after having had sexual relations; to work in silence; to respect all taboos in general.

575 She then makes a libation of karite oil on the altar and rubs it on
323 the bodies of the initiates who must run their tongues over the pottery,
782 thus making an oath. Sheep, brought by the initiates' parents, are
431 then killed by having their throat cut over the hearth in the name of the potters while the elders of the society present to the initiates gifts consisting of several pots which they will sell for profit while waiting for their first work. This gift is moreover a sign of adoption.

323 The utensils are made with clay, mbogo pasa, taken from the
317 bottom of the watercourse or along the river's edge; they belong to
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323 Faro. These places have as taboos the wearing of indigo and pregnancy.
317 No pregnant woman may approach them without provoking the death
784 of the child she is carrying, thus ultimately impairing the durability of pottery and seriously harming the society of which she is a member.

323 An annual sacrifice is offered by the potters at the end of the winter
796 season when, the level of the river having dropped and the banks lowered, they return for the first time to collect the clay which they need. Dressed in white, they bring out their hoes and the sickle with which they cut the damp grasses used to cover the pots on the hearth during firing, while the head of the society carries the altars. The objects are placed in a pile on a bed of nyama fibers used for separating them from the ground. The throats of two red roosters are cut open over this pile while a prayer is addressed to Faro, requesting authorization to take the /127/ mbogo pasa during the year, and seeking his protection and help for the work of the society's membership.

The potters make an annual offering to their altars on the day their husbands sacrifice on the forges. Immediately after the libations, they come and squat before the forge altar on which they throw some ten cowrie shells. They then go to the ñintin, undress, and present to it their genitals from the front and from the back, this gesture being an indication of their submission to the spirits of pottery which are the same as those of the forge. Still naked, they circle the pile of ashes left from the last firing and light a big bonfire; this fire attracts the bee eaters, tatugu kononi, which circle over the flames. They shoot some down with a sling, cook them, and reduce them to ashes which they mix with karite oil; they rub their bodies with this mixture before purifying themselves by going through the flames. As an offering to the spirits, they then throw pots on the fire which they put out before returning home.

323 The potters cultivate together a small ritual field in which a fe-
344 male twin sows white peas, tikaninkuru, symbols of their right hand. The produce of this harvest is eaten communally on a mound, walawala, after an offering of several seeds is made to the altars and tools. A potter whose tools are broken by the fire must go through a purification with the products of this field.

326 The wives of blacksmiths, whether or not they are potters, are
304 skilled in practicing excision on young girls.

794 or Koma/," Outremer, 1929; H. Labouret, Les Manding et leur langue.

794 The Komo
561 society, komo tyew (literally, men, people of the Komo) is composed of all circumcised men, with the exception of the griot who may under no condition become members, after an initiation performed according to the age grade, the members of which are called tonyaw. The hierarchy is rigorously respected: an earlier age grade will always be ahead of the one that follows it in all circumstances of secular or religious life. The Komo recognizes a chief, komotigi (literally, master or owner of the Komo) who preferably belongs to the caste of blacksmiths and whose function is hereditary. The son automatically assumes command of the age grade which follows that of his father. Upon the latter's death, he changes his age grade and becomes the head of his father's. In the case where the owner of the Komo dies
[304] young and his eldest son, who is to inherit the office, is not yet circumcised, he is made to undergo the operation in the night following the death, and on the following day is proclaimed chief (1).

1. In La Religion Bambara, L. Tauxier points out that in some villages the chief of the Komo exercises his power only during a seven-year term. At the end of seven years an election takes place and the function is not hereditary.

794 Because of the importance of his functions, the chief of the Komo
784 is made to respect a great number of taboos. In particular he may not penetrate into the sanctuary if he has not been chaste during the past twenty-four hours. If the taboo is broken, he must warn the men of his age grade and sacrifice two roosters upon the altars to purify himself. His wife is initiated (for she is apt to see certain ritual
[562] objects generally hidden from women because of her intimacy with the chief), but she is not present at any of the ceremonies to which only the members are /144/ admitted. If she commits adultery she
[837] brings about her husband's exclusion from the society, not only as chief but also as member.

794 The chief is often assisted by two elders belonging to his age grade,
561 whose advice he seeks in all cases concerning the community. In addition, he is always helped by young initiates. If one of these

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3. If the village has no Komo, the name may be given above the paternal Kuafebla.

two jars of millet beer, a ram which will be sacrificed, and money to the griot who will sing during the ceremony.

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826] A lock of the newborn's hair is shaved off and kept in a case (sebe) which, before being carried away, will be hidden in an oil container for the following reasons: to protect the person from magical practices; to prevent a donkey from eating it, an occurrence which would cause the child's death; to permit him to seek for himself health and a long life in the image of his hair which will have remained in good condition.

The rest of the hair is carried by a female relative to the river, into which it is thrown in honor of Faro. Next a band of white cotton called faro fini (literally, Faro's clothing), on which someone has "spat" kola nut juice, is bound around the forehead of the newly baptized baby to indicate his subjugation to the spirit.

The senior elder then examines with attention the hairline and the meeting point of the eyebrows on the forehead before announcing in a loud voice the signs determining the child's character (tere). Then he grasps the child and swings it /179/ seven times from east to west, eight times from south to north above the altar while giving it the forename (toko) which he has inherited from a dead person along with the spiritual principles (1). The griot recite the father's genealogy

1. According to another source of information, the eldest son receives the forename of his paternal grandfather, the second son that of his father, and the following sons those of the mother's fathers and grandfathers.

(burudyu); the senanku comes to joke with the newborn and gently pulls his nose and ears.

852
304 On the same day the blacksmith draws on the child's face the wolo ti, consisting of seven vertical frontal scars and two horizontal scars under each eye. The first scars represent the complete man (ni and dya); the second, representing the number two, symbol of

852 "the unknown in creation" (see pp 23 and 24), recall man's existence
304 in this state. Consequently he is conscious of the unknown and has the possibility of apprehending it. These scars act upon the tere of the child and give him at the same time strength, courage, virtue, as well as the strength to penetrate the knowledge of the invisible (1).

[842]

1. They may be redrawn at the root of the nose of an adult who has despaired of having any children, or on the thigh of a woman who wishes to be fertile. These scars, drawn at birth, are not the only ones which the Bambara wear. See S. de Ganay, "On a Form of Cicatrization among the Bambara."

852 In a blacksmith's family, the name is given near the paternal
553 forge. In the presence of all the village artisans, the kotigi shaves
326 the head of the newborn while an elder prepares seven small sticks, over each one of which he pronounces the name of an ancestor. The kotigi, whose eyes are blindfolded, pulls out in succession three sticks from the group; the third determines the name which he immediately proclaims. While the women chant, the father removes from his altar the kongobwona axe as well as the other ritual objects. The throat of a sheep is cut over all these objects while a prayer is recited. The newborn's head is rubbed first with the axe, then with shaved off hair saturated with sacrificial blood. This gesture introduces the child into the family group. Next he receives the scars of the blacksmiths.

Circumcision

304 Whereas in former times circumcision was mandatory and performed
561 upon young men (about twenty years), it is now practiced at an early age if the parents are wealthy enough to afford the expenses involved.

/180/ Because of this fact, a child of eight years may be circumcised with an adolescent of sixteen to eighteen years, whose parents are poor and have only slowly accumulated the articles necessary for the ceremony. These two boys will belong to the same age grade (flã̃), and will be comrades (flani) all their lives, having the same rights and duties. Age thus has a restricted role in social relations.

●304 The date of the circumcision alone makes a coherent whole of a
561 heterogeneous group—an age grade within /181/ which all the members owe each other friendship, confidence, and help in all phases of social and private life.

Once the operation has been decided upon, the relatives proceed

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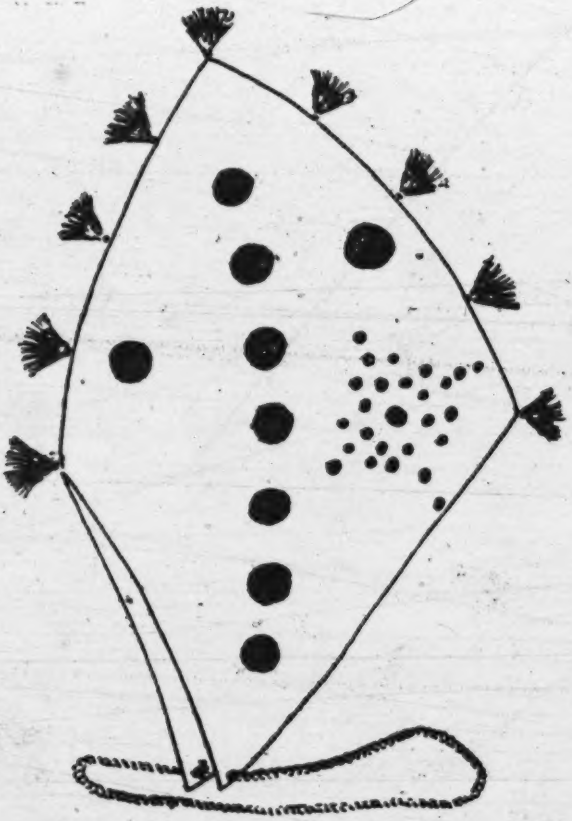

Fig. 14 — Cap of the circumcised Bambara. The nine black spots represent the child, his dya, and the cardinal points. The design at the right represents the sumangolo, or the coming of the twelve waters of the future. (See Fig. 3)

first to make the cap worn during the seclusion. The white cloth is presented to the Niger by a uterine brother who addresses a prayer to Faro requesting permission to draw with black earth the designs that will cover it. They will protect the child who is in a state of impurity

304 throughout the seclusion, the cap itself guaranteeing protection of his
292 head against the rays of fire from the fifth sky, koblenkaba (see Fig. 14).

304 Seven large black dots, vertically disposed, represent the child, 3,
292 and his dya, 4, as well as the man, 3, which he will later become, and
531 his future wife, 4. They also insure his protection from east to west. The two other dots insure it from north to south. The cross of small dots recalls the sumangolos, the "realization of the world" (1) and the

1. See p. 56, Fig. 4.

purification obtained after the operation and the loss of the wanzo. Eight tassels (Faro's number) are placed on the cap, whose fringes were spun by a grandmother and are sewn on to "attract the forces of space." A ninth at the top is blackened with the spirit's earth. With his head thus covered, the circumcised boy is placed in the protective and purifying light of Faro. To operate upon a child without putting the cap on him would in fact amount to "bowing down before the acts of Mousso Koroni."

304 On his part, the blacksmith-circumciser makes preparations for the
326 operation, the essential instrument of which is a knife called boloko
413 kumba moru (literally, knife head, mother of the circumcision). He himself has forged it and carries it in a small leather sheath hung from his hip (see Fig. 15) (2).

[582]

2. The endogamy among blacksmiths is attributed to their role in circumcision and to the fact that their tools, especially this knife, are impregnated with the wanzo of the adolescents.

The handle is slipped into a sort of iron sheath closed at one extremity called kurukun (literally, ball head) and open at the other called sukala (literally, sorcerer's handle). It is forged from one piece with the blade dyomuru fala (literally, orphan of the knife) and called "without pity" in archaic language.

The knife and its handle on the one hand, together with the metal sheath on the other, symbolize the person of the circumcised boy and the foreskin which is to be removed.

304 326 532 413

Before the operation, the blacksmith washes the handle, an act which parallels /182/ the washing of the penis, and draws on the blade ritual designs either in charcoal or with boiled millet (1).

1. Some artisans have, once and for all, engraved the ritual designs on the blade.

The three figures ɲɛ mani saba (literally, three little male persons) represent the first three circumcised men (Gwonna, Gwondo, and Gwonkè) who belonged to the blacksmiths' families at the village of Gwondougou. Every descendant of these ancestors must be circumcised like them. In making the drawing the operator says:

"Gwonna, Gwondo, Gwonkè, you have discovered iron and you withstood the pain (of the first circumcision), you feel shame neither by night nor by day; our feet are placed in your footsteps; the iron did not shame you, let it not shame us; it is the will of Faro... attack, attack, attack" (these last three words are addressed to the knife)(2).

2. Gwonna, gwondo, gwonkè, aw ye neke damene, ka neke gale munyu, aw ma malo ɲu ani kle, an se daledo an se danola, neke maw malo a ka na an malo, faro hakili do, ɲu ɲu ɲu.

The four figures, muso mani nani (literally, four little female persons), are the first four excised women, the inventors of pottery, who were the wives of these blacksmith.

The bird is the tatugu koroni, the incarnation of the eight ancestors of the blacksmiths. It recalls that circumcision is painful, hard, hot, comparable to the effects of fire, and that it is necessary to labor and suffer in order to withstand the cutting knife. This is also what the artisan recalls when, as he operates the children, he sings several times over:

"The knife is hot; the timorous man cannot stand it. It is a purification" (3).

3. A ka gwã, ɲɛ jito tise ka muñu, saniyali do.

304 The foreskin, which is tied by a string (drawn at the center of the
532 blade) at the moment of the operation, is placed upon the pembele
413 (black rectangle) and the cutting knife is tapped with a small wooden mallet, gossilâ (drawn at the tip of the knife). These three figures receive during operation the offering of the first spurt of blood from the circumcised boy.

The line, which crosses the blade along the middle, separates the bird and the ancestors who gave proof of courage from the instruments used for the circumcision. As a division it symbolizes first of all that each grade of circumcised boys must be considered apart from the others. This is its social meaning. But the delicacy of the line itself has a meaning which applies to the individual: each one must, in his own image, be morally /183/ simple, just, and sensitive. By conforming to the rule symbolically indicated by the design, the individual will become a member of the elite.

304 The date of the operation is fixed when Mousso Koroni's star, sigi
787 dolo (Sirius), rises in the evening at a certain point in the east (1).
821

1. See note 1 p. 47. To determine the date, however, the ndomo society may be consulted, which sometimes postpones it to keep its members longer.

After the boys to be operated have been counted, each gets ready, and on the appointed day the mother washes her son's penis with water in which an iron axe or hoe has been soaked. Then she prepares a dish
[362] of rice, ye farina to "dish of man's bravery," which the child eats before he is led to the place of the operation, called yorola sakole "reserved place," located in the bush.

304 When all are gathered together the blacksmith-circumciser operates
326 upon each one in turn after he has made them sit down in a circle on the ground. Pulling and twisting the foreskin, he ties it with the string which he keeps taut by securing its extremity between his toes. He next places the member upon the pembele, rests the knife /on the foreskin/ and taps /it/ with the wooden mallet. In this way he cuts off the foreskin while saying the following words:

"Circumcised one, your father, your grandfather, your great-grandfather, the father of that one too, the ear (the genitals) of the ancestors of the latter have withstood (the pain); you, yourself, withstand it as

304 326 /184/ they did. Faro, Teliko, Soba! You who are a man, your number is three; three of the penis, three of the twins, designs of the penis, it is the tradition, withstand it; Faro!" (ter) /repeat three times/(1).

1. Bolokodɛ̀ i fa, i moke, o ta fa,
o ta fa were, o ta fa klo masamaw ye
munyu, i yere ka munyu u cǒko la,
faro, teliko, soba, o ye ce ta saba ye,
wulu wo, flani wo, kolo nyeke, lada
do, i ka munyu; faro (ter).

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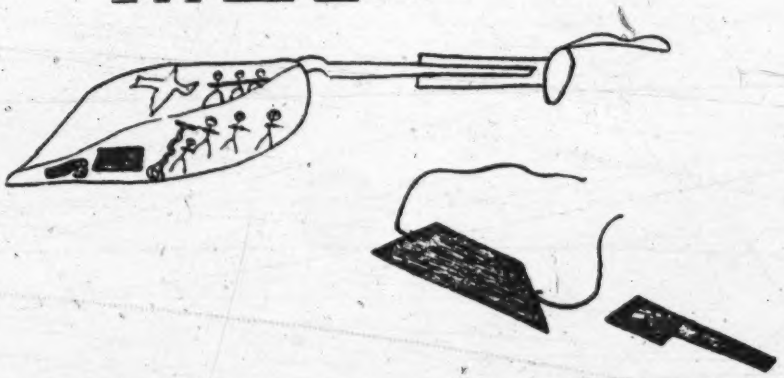

Fig. 15. — The circumcision knife decorated with ritual designs: three men and four women (representing the number seven); the bee eater symbolizing fire; the string; the small board; and the hammer used for the operation (these last two objects are reproduced on a larger scale to the right). (Drawing by an informant.)

304 326 831 After the removal, the operator makes scars upon the child's penis, called faro nyeke (literally, signs of Faro). Under the muscle wulu dyuru (literally, rope of the penis), a small hole is carefully made. Since the penis is considered a source of strength, the muscle which maintains it and erects it binds the circulation of the blood and helps man in all his acts. It is through this muscle that man transmits nerves to his children. A straight organ, firmly held in check, keeps the man and his descendants from numerous illnesses; the aim of this mutilation is to obtain complete and well formed foreskins and clitoris in the children of the party concerned. After the perforation, the operator places in the orifice a little pepper and tomato juice while saying:

304 326 843

304 "Strong (when you form) the child, (you who form) the child (in
326 the) womb, give it to Faro" (1).
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1. Farifla dẽ, dẽzo dẽ, i ka di faro ma.

The embryo, placed in the feminine womb by Faro, receives force and virility from the pepper and is developed with the help of the tomato.

304 Two small holes are carefully made symbolizing man and his dya,
326 while the following prayer is recited:

"Two holes of the penis; I draw the twins and I do it well, the skin of the person is captive, the skin of the person (gives) the twins; withstand them; Faro" (ter) (2).

2. Wulu wo fla, flani mba ti ka nẽ,
moko wolo ye dyo ye, moko wolo ye
flani nye, i ka munyu faro (ter).

"The skin of man, they say, and his entire body are miserable, captives. He is condemned to work, sweat, and suffer. But these two perforations indicate that man is always called upon to procreate twins, the visible images of Faro. Lacking them, he may have numerous children who will return to him, in sweat and work, the seed which he has placed in the maternal womb and which gives shape to the seeds given by Faro."

At the root of the penis, small lines, kolo nyeke, are made with the knife while the operator says:

"Mark of the penis, the genital organ receives this scarification because of the child (whom it will procreate); it is for this that man may be courageous; the one who has (this scar) is respected; great Faro, satiation of Faro" (3).

3. Kolo nyeke, wulu ti kũye dẽ koye,
a ye ẽe farifla ko ye, min ya ke bonyedo,
faro ba, faro fa.

/185/ These recall the scars inflicted upon man's body and symbolize the desired multiplication of his offspring. Finally, they indicate the superiority of the one who has withstood and accepted pain.

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If the patient has inherited the ni and the dya of a child who died just before his birth in the family (in the narrow sense), the penis is perforated while the following prayer is recited:

"You, so and so, the sons of your fathers are dead, may you replace them night and day, the hole in the penis has been made on you; "Faro" (ter) (1).

1. E kari macina, e fa dew bana, e ka o lu soro su ani kle la, wulu wo ke la e la; faro (ter).

This perforation designates him to procreate the children his father has lost.

Seated in a circle, all the circumcised boys bleed upon the ground into individual holes, nyama bla dinge (literally, hole in which the nyama is left) (2), dug between their parted legs, thus passing on to

2. Dinge is a word in the ancient language.

the impure earth their wanzo and a part of their tere. Meanwhile, the circumciser recited the following prayer:

"Blood of the penis, blood of the transfer of the wanzo, blood which chases the wanzo, enter the hole, may you pay (my debt), may you protect me (against the nyama of the foreskin), against bad fortune, against space; o mound" (ter) (3).

3. Wulu dyoli, wanzo fili dyoli, wanzo gẽ dyoli, i bi dõ dinge kono, i kã sara, i kã kisi a makunangoya, i ka kisi kene ama; walawala (ter).

Then, he kneads a bit of blood-covered earth, the principle of which, bwa, is stronger than the wanzo (4) and makes from it a kind

4. The word bwa is provisionally translated by "essence, extract." One says dukukolo bwa or seke, "principle or extract of the earth."

of dressing which he applies to the wounds. In this way the child also

304 326 recovers part of his tere. The organ is then held up by means of a small apparatus, mine naw, made of a millet stem split in two in the shape of a fork.

"Circumcision is a sacrifice" (1). It is only valid if blood has run,

1. Bolokoli ye saraka ye.

and any patient who has not wet the ground with his blood is wounded on the thigh by the circumciser. The same is true for a child born [732 582] without a foreskin. This detail must, moreover, be kept secret by the members of his age grade, since the revelation of a malformation might prevent the individual concerned from contracting a marriage (2).

2. A woman might believe that these malformations are the sign that the man who was operated upon has not lost his wanzo, a fact which would be a definite obstacle to marriage.

/186/ When all is finished, the operator, holding the foreskins in his hand, says these words before burying them:

"We have transferred the wanzo of the circumcised child, may the tere be well" (3).

3. Ãn ye dẽ bolokole wanzo fili la, tere ka ñe.

304 292 561 After this, the circumcised boys have their caps put first on their napes and foreheads representing the east-west direction, and then on the sides of their heads representing the north-south direction. All their strength resides from then on in the headpiece which they will wear night and day, without removing it, during the entire period of seclusion.

304 784 561 The approach to the site of the operation is formally forbidden to women and uncircumcised males. The one who might go there out of curiosity "would contract the wanzo" (wanzo ba nofe, "the wanzo follows him"). Any uncircumcised boy who might break this law would have to take the consequences at the time of his own operation

304 which would be a dangerous one (1). The same rule applies to the
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1. The approach of the virulent wanzo of the uncircumcised boy acts upon those of the boys undergoing the operations and afflicts them in the genital organs.

enclosure, consisting of several huts, where the newly circumcised boys remain under the surveillance of the sema. The enclosure is situated at a distance of several tens of meters from the village in order to isolate the age grade. For all that touches them, such as clothing, sticks, sistrums, dishes, and refuse, with the exception of the cap, is impregnated with their wanzo.

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[43] The newly circumcised boys receive from their parents gifts of cowrie shells and food called wanzo sababu yala, "in honor of the wanzo," to speed their recovery.

[194] On the night which precedes the sixth day after the operation, a day called daworo, the children are initiated to the Komo (2).

2. See p. 203.

The following day, the sema leads them to the edge of the river, where they wash their wounds for the first time. This act, which brings about direct intervention of the element in which Faro lives, has moreover a social meaning: it consecrates the age grade and from this moment on, the children belong for the rest of their lives to the same flã̃, exchanging jokes and insults which are suitable between senãnku (3). It must be noted that this very simple act of communal

3. See p. 119.

ablution constitutes the inauguration of an age grade of circumcised boys and sets off from that moment all the rights and obligations its members will have toward each other.

A meal, eaten in common and accompanied by songs and dances, ends the ceremonies of the daworo. Hereafter the ablutions are repeated daily until the wounds are healed.

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881 /187/ On the last day, all that has been in contact with the newly circumcised boys is gathered together at a crossroad near the enclosure.

304 561 881

Sistrums, sticks, mats, as well as the wood from the huts and the refuse that has been carefully swept up, are put in a pile which is ignited. Each circumcised boy jumps over the fire three times and then runs to his home without looking back. In this way he finally loses the rest of the wanzo which he has kept after the operation. Only his cap is brought back and given his mother who keeps it until her death. On the next day, after putting on new clothes the boy is taught what he himself is in the following words: "the person is yo and yo is the person (1)" and in the circumstances of creation. He is

1. Ma ye yo ye, yo ye ma ye.
On yo see pp. 18-26.

then admitted completely into the society of the male adults of his village.

Circumcision has a profound effect upon the person. At this moment, the child loses the physical support of the female sex which is the foreskin; he becomes a man (vir) ready to fulfill his role of a male capable of reproducing. Moreover, he "throws off his wanzo" which escapes from the body at the moment of the operation (2). In his

2. Wanzo file la. The wearing of clothing and ornaments assumes great importance in the loss of the wanzo. Among the Bozo, where the children are circumcised very young, they are not considered to have lost their wanzo until the moment these clothes are given to them.

[171]

leap above the fire this force joins, in the altars and the mask of the ndomo, the forces of both the uncircumcised and the circumcised of the preceding years (3).

3. See p. 227.

At the same time the circumcised boy improves his tere, for this latter force, diminished by the bloody operation, increases at the moment when the child dons his new clothing. Until his circumcision, the child only performed minor tasks; after circumcision he is considered a male adult and officially admitted to the rituals and labors of the community.

304 766 The importance of the wanzo and the necessity of its leaving the person are such that in the case where a child dies uncircumcised, the operation is performed on his corpse. If this is not possible, the circumciser cuts his left ear and says:

"I cut the ear instead of circumcision" (1).

1. Mba klo tikę bolokoli nona bi la ye.

It is buried with the corpse or kept in the paternal home, but the wanzo leaves the child. If the operation was not performed, it would contribute to the formation of a very dangerous nyama, which would be more aggressive even than that of an old man and from which the society would have to suffer.

/188/ Excision

304 323 189 The operation is performed with a little iron knife by a potter, the wife of a blacksmith. The blade, which is male, represents the sun; the handle, which is female, represents both the clitoris and the moon. The woman protects herself from the wanzo of the newly excised girls by wearing bracelets and charms and by smearing a black salve on her eyes.

304 323 The operation is performed in full daylight at the edge of the village and in the presence of the assembled kinsmen. In certain localities it takes place near the potters' hearth. Each little girl is seated in turn on an inverted pot and is operated upon while prayers are recited. Just as the boy whose foreskin is badly formed is wounded on the thigh, so the girl in the same situation is considered excised if she submits to a test which replaces excision. In the latter case, the woman operator places a hedgehog skin between the girl's thighs and presses these together energetically so as to make the blood run (2).

2. In case the girl is the daughter of a blacksmith, the blood running over the pottery indicates her future role as potter (see p. 169.

The young girls must neither cry nor moan; on the contrary, they sing to exalt the departure of the wanzo.

304 During the seclusion, they wear about their head a piece of white
[242 cloth, Faro's color, which has the same function as the cap of the
534] circumcised boy. They shake a gourd bolokode barani, filled with eight grains or small pebbles, whose sound keeps passers-by away. The leaps, which they perform over the fire made of clothes, gourds, and refuse that have been ignited, end the seclusion and rid them of their wanzo, which goes to settle in the altars of the ndomo.

It is said of a young girl who was well excised that she is well behaved and carries herself with dignity. On the contrary, it is said of a girl of light morals "that her hands were not washed clean" (1).

1. A bolo ma ko ka dye ya.

which means that she was improperly excised.

Funerals

761 The effect of death is to dissociate the elements composing the
764 person. The body becomes a corpse (su) from which the /189/ ni and
775 the dya escape to follow their particular destinies, while the tere is transformed into nyama, an active and dangerous force which wanders about the deceased. The funeral rites aim first to channel the deceased's spiritual elements which must be conserved in the interest of the deceased as well as that of the community. Moreover, through the care given to the body and to these elements, the memory of the dead person is piously kept up. The notion of a final resurrection, promised to all who have lived, inspires these preparations. The bones of the deceased, which are like the exuvia of his physical body, its solid and durable framework, join the exuvia of his soul which is kept in the altars of the Komo. Thus, at the end of time, the dead man "will rise and, to everyone's joy, join his family."

764 The funeral rites, which the Bambara have always celebrated, have evolved along with their beliefs. At the time when the cult of the balanza was flourishing, the dead bodies were hung from trees until they rotted, their bones picked up and kept by their descendants.
[532] The ancestors of the Gwonna then carved pieces of sunzun wood called mani (literally, little person) in the image of the dead. The length of the wood was proportionate to the length of the body; the head, arms, legs, and genitals were carefully reproduced. The mani

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1. A ngari ko le ye ngo (ngari is a word of the archaic language which expresses submission.)

Each person responds by striking their genital organs with the little finger: "It is well humiliated" (2).

[826]

2. A ngari ko karu. The little finger is the symbol of the whole person; to strike with it is to acquiesce with all one's being.

They are led to the door of their home where the village elders of both sexes are gathered; they repeat their apologies to which the same response is given, accompanied by the same gesture of acquiescence.

[304] The chief of the Komo and three elders of his age grade who have never broken any taboos led them to the river bank where they undergo a new circumcision for the man and a new excision for the woman; the blood which is a gift to Faro must fall into the water. This operation is called "purification of the foreskin" (yiriyiri tige) and the pain suffered has an expiatory value.

The sixth day after the operation the members, gathered on the village square (3), dance and sing to the rhythm of the Komo, which

3. This ceremony, called daworo is comparable to that celebrated on the sixth day after circumcision.

is furiously beaten out, in the following words:

"Circumcised children, it is not good to break the taboo of the anus. I am telling you, Soma and members of the society, do not count their faults. Faro "(ter) (4).

4. (I ye ye) boloko dew tne tyẽ mañi boda la; nye fo aw ye somaw moko ka na jigi u la; faro (ter). That is to say, "forgive them." The word anus here replaces the word genitals which, according to propriety, is not spoken.

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2. Ni nya ke ɲyɛ̃ fla i ka n fa; ka kadi ka kago, gariseke bo fa ka cã; faro (ter).

The water swallowed after these words constitutes a solemn promise to Faro not to repeat the fault.

Next, they are carried home, the man by two members of the society and the woman by three of her companions, so that their toes, [826] the temporary lodging places of the spiritual principles which have returned to them, may not touch the impure earth. They remain three and four days, respectively, on their mats without making a movement. On the seventeenth day, with a thousand precautions, they may resume a more normal life, but they will be entirely free only when a birth occurring in the family will eliminate from their bodies the soul and the double of the dead child by transferring these to the newborn.

/199/ Death of an Uncircumcised Boy

763 When an uncircumcised boy is seriously ill the chief of the ndomo (1) has a rooster sacrificed in order to find out if recovery is possible.

1. See p. 222.

In the case of a negative response the children, taking turns night and day, go into the bush and sound off the ritual objects under the leadership of an initiate. In this way the soul of the dying boy is certain to be captured at the moment of death and channeled by the sound wave and led into the ritual objects themselves. Two initiates are posted near the home of the sick and, as soon as they learn of his death, they go to warn the children in the bush to make them stop playing. The chief sits down facing the west and recites a prayer; then he sacrifices the victims offered by the family.

766 Before the corpse is buried, it is circumcised, and the wanzo goes [304] to settle in the mask of the ndomo. During the night following the burial the members go to the fresh grave and sound the ritual instruments which contain the soul. Each year they repeat this action above the children's graves following the threshing of the harvest to "awaken the dead and to tell them that their souls are not lost."

*173 Déssé-koro (1789-1802). According to one tradition, Déssé was captured at the same time as Foro-koro and taken with him to Ségou where he is said to have been marked with the [115] tatoo (1) peculiar to the slaves of the Ségou branch of the

●[304 567]

1. This well-known tatoo consists of three cuts on each side of the face running from the temples to the lower jaw in front of the ears.

Kouloubali. Authority would normally have passed to Déssé on the death of Séba Mana, but because Déssé's fate was uncertain it was offered instead to Sira Bo. The latter is said to have refused at first, but he accepted when his brother Mo-siré guaranteed that even if Déssé should return, the power would not be withdrawn. When Déssé returned ten years later, he respected the promise made by his brother Mo-siré and waited until the death of Sira Bo to take command.

Whatever may be the truth of the matter, Déssé took advantage of the quarrels that arose at Ségou upon Ngolo Dyara's death to capture Niamina. It is said that a small forest of baobab trees later arose on the spot where his troops had encamped.

When Ma-n-son had been relieved of the worst of his worries by his victory over Nyana-n-koro, he was anxious to avenge the capture of Niamina (2) and so turned his attention to

2. The relations between Déssé and the people of Ségou are very obscure. Some say that, on being asked for help by Nyana-n-koro, Déssé stipulated that he would only agree to help if Foro-koro's skull were returned to him. When he had gained possession of the relic, he returned to Kaarta, promising to come back at the appropriate time. He did in fact return and encamped near Ségou after the defeat and death of Nyana-n-koro; he

567 slaves (1). The master often keeps this paramount head near

1. This appears to be the application of a kind of right of seniority, analogous to that of primogeniture.

him as his confidential agent; otherwise, he buys a slave or selects a free man for this high post and thus better controls the situation. In such a case, the paramount leader recognized by the slaves is merely the spokesman for his congeners in their dealings with the master.

[304] Among the Kouloubali the wolo-so have a characteristic tattoo formed by three broad incisions from temple to lower jaw on both sides of the face. Far from feeling humiliated by this mark, every wolo-so is as proud of it as though it were a sign of noble origin. Many free men have adopted this tattoo in order to pose as members of the great Bambara family.

The status of a slave is not immutable, but generally includes three stages described by the following names: san'dyon', "a slave acquired through trade"; dyon'wolo-so, "slave born in the house"; and dyongoro, "freed."

A newly purchased slave is put under observation. If he appears to be intractable or vicious or is afflicted with a serious disease (epilepsy, Leprosy, sleeping sickness, nyctalopia), one gets rid of him as soon as possible.

If he proves to be docile, devoted, industrious, and a good worker, he is kept. He is given a job in the house or is [192] placed with an old servant to be trained or with an artisan to be taught a trade.

A female slave in the same circumstances who becomes a mother at once finds her situation improved (1). Her child is

1. The father's identity is of no importance, since the children all belong by law to her master.

wolo-so, "born in the house," and she acquires the same

553 851 [562] Women are not admitted to the men's circle. Gathered near the mother's hut, they know that a name has been given, but do not know what it is. The woman who tied the cord then washes the baby three times in warm, soapy water and, taking water into her mouth, sprinkles the tiny body from neck to lower back three times. She then expresses her good wishes. Carrying the child, she goes to the door of the hut, where the father and family heads are waiting, and asks the name. Then she returns to the women and places the child on the lap of an old woman who blows into the baby's ears three times and then shouts in each ear: "Kuyo! Kuyo! i tua dara, "that is, "Kuyo! Kuyo! [854] your name is ...." The child is then wrapped in the narrow swaddling band which the mother will henceforth use to carry him on her back, and if it is a boy, the baby is rolled three times over the blade of an ax, or if a girl, over an iron implement for picking cotton. While this is going on, everyone is expressing best wishes.

[184] In Kaarta the ceremony is somewhat different. A beef or a sheep killed in front of the mother's hut, and dege [Ed., coarsely ground millet in water] is also prepared. The baby's [564] head is shaved, and the hair is placed on the dege. Each guest puts his right hand on the edge of the gourd and a griot expresses good wishes for the newborn child. Then the guests dance around the dish of dege; the hair is removed from it and given to the mother to keep. [213] Then if the occasion warrants it, the [304] three lines of tattooing peculiar to the Kouloubali are made on the baby's face with a dagger. Finally the griot takes the child, carries it around the crowd, and returns it to the father, who must then make known the chosen name. When the father has pronounced the name, the griot again takes the child and, making a trumpet of his hands, cries out to him three times: "your name is...."

551 In principle, the name (tua) recalls some circumstance surrounding the birth. A posthumous child is usually given his father's name, as though he were the reincarnation of the father, or more commonly, he is called Fa-n-ko, "posthumous" (literally, "the one who came after the fa"). If the baby shows some resemblance to a deceased person, he is named for the person or,

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Soli (2)

2. The word soli is used in Kaarta; at Ségou the term is boloko or ngolo-ko, literally, "affair of birth."

The single word soli is used for what we call circumcision and excision. This is because a Bambara has in mind not this or that surgical operation, accessory in nature, but rather the ceremony which for boys and girls alike marks the passage or, more accurately in line with the etymology of the word soli, the fact of being born to a new status.

881 The soli does not take place every year, because it involves considerable expense for the families, which they cannot always meet. At the instigation of the boys who must undergo the soli and who, therefore are called soli-ma-u (people of the soli), the family heads assemble at the call of the nyana-n-son-na-ba to decide whether or not the soli will be held. If the decision is affirmative, the boys and girls then take steps to make sure that the festival (nyara, "orgy, wedding") will be as elaborate as possible. In principle, the date coincides with the third day of the festival of the sheep.

Guided by their elders, the young girls (soli-ma-mɔso-u) go from door to door to solicit millet for the banquet (3) which

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3. The menu includes couscous (basi), and it is called soli-kili-basi, "basi of the solicitation for the soli," on account of the source of the millet used to prepare it, solicited by the children.

they are expected to give the elders (koro-u) on the second day of the feast of the sheep. The period of the ceremonies of the soli actually begins with this meal. [241]

In the afternoon of this day, the boys make the customary sacrifice to their genie-protector, dancing in his honor in ceremonial costume but without flagellation.

881 evil genii in order to preserve the "people of the soli" (soli-ma-u)
787 from their bewitchments.

881 The soli. The soli, this make-believe birth, is marked
by a bloody operation, circumcision for the boys and excision
●304 for the girls. The fact that the ceremony does not get its name
from this operation demonstrates that it is merely show; it is
merely a rite of separation between the previous state and the
new one (3). The operation takes place at dawn.

[171]

3. That is why among other peoples the operation does not exist or represented by a mere slash on the thigh (among the Koniagui).

Boys. The blacksmith who is to circumcise the boys waits outside the village under a tree. Assisted by members [243] of the sects and especially by the Komo-tigi, he performs the operation behind a loincloth hung up as a screen. The boy stands erect, and the blacksmith draws out the prepuce and cuts it off, after having determined approximately the proper place to cut. The patient is expected to show no weakness; on the contrary, he exerts himself to say a few words to show his courage.

As soon as the operation is finished, a gunshot announces the news to the elders crouched about the village fires, and a female griot proclaims it to the bystanders. The Komo-tigi takes a few nyanka leaves, burns them, and goes to place the ashes on the boy's familial kara. The boy runs off to rejoin his companions under the tree especially chosen for this reassembly. All the boys will spend their days there, on the fringe of society with which they are forbidden to mingle. They return to the village only at night, to sleep in a hut reserved for them.

881 A man reputed to know how to care for circumcised
304 boys lives with them, takes care of them, and closely supervises
292 them; this is the sema-tye. Every day abundant food is brought to him for his patients. The latter wear a dloki (blouse) and kursi (trousers) made of cotton cloth, blue or yellow-brown (basa) depending on their affiliations (1), and their headgear is usually

1. The basa color is much in demand

881 among the Bambara, while the Marka
304 use cloth dyed indigo-blue.
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a high cap with strings extending from the earlaps. They can only leave the place where they are assembled, even for the needs of nature, under the leadership of the sema-tye and shaking a stick of wood to which are attached bits of broken pottery. This rattle is called n-koso-m-bara.

881 They pass the time plaiting mats, gossiping, laughing,
304 and pestering passers-by. On market days they are permitted to block the paths leading to the village and to collect a tithe from the traders.

The officials of the sects often visit them in their retreat.

Girls. The blacksmiths' wives who are to remove part of the clitoris await the girls outside the village under the trees. Some matrons assist them. Each child in turn runs up to the operator and squeezes herself between [244] the legs of the matron who exposes the clitoris. The excised clitoris is laid
[789] in a little woven basket and is carefully preserved for making talismans.

The completion of the operation is announced in the same way as for the boys, and the Komo-tigi likewise puts the ashes from nyanka leaves on the familial kara.

The girl then rejoins her companions in the hut reserved for them in each section of the settlement. There they are under the surveillance of an old woman, the sema-moso, who knows how to take care of them and who sees to it that they behave properly. They are very well fed.

881 Wrapped in skirts, they lean on canes of dried millet stalks when they walk and shake a gourd pierced with holes and
[514] filled with pebbles. They go out only for the needs of nature and then all in a body. They warn the passers-by by shaking their rattles and singing improvised songs. As they near paths outside the village, they intone a refrain.

Soli da woro (1). The seclusion of the soli-ma ceases

1. Literally, "sixth day of the soli."

614 religious and reciprocal oath. Their contribution entitled them
701 to a share of the booty. Volunteers, who enlisted for an engagement or a whole campaign, came in under conditions settled in advance.

The fama furnished the allies, just as he did the volunteers, with whatever they needed and deducted the amount from their share of the loot. Sometimes a third party, not involved in the expedition, provided mounts, equipment, and weapons for the enterprise in exchange for a prearranged reward.

In short, armed pillage was a business directed by the fama, who could admit interested participants if he so desired. If the operation were successful, the clan gained predominance over
[727] the conquered regions, which the fama then exploited as he saw fit. The booty was the first result of the enterprise, and it served both to pay the expenses incurred in the affair and to swell the treasury of the clan.

This explains why the clan's army, for a consideration, hired itself out to anyone who asked for support, as an ally, as a mercenary force, or in any other capacity. The army might simply intervene in a quarrel of its own accord when there seemed to be profit to be gained (1). [313]

1. See below how the fama of Ségou lent his support to a marabout of Sous. The Bambara also intervened on numerous occasions in the internal quarrels of Khasso, Boundou, Fouta, etc. Their role as mercenaries is clearly shown in the Tarikh es Soudan.

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701 The ton'-dyon' were distinguished by a special hair ar-
569 rangement. Their heads were completely shaved except for three
[302] tufts of hair which formed two braids on the crown of the head and one at the nape of the neck.

The slaves of the household of the fama could be recognized by their well-known tattoo (1) which consisted of three

• [304]

1. In general, it is risky to depend

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incautiously on tattooing as a distinguishing mark of race or even of rank; the tattoo described here has not only been used by people of various origins, but has even been appropriated by all kinds of people as a form of snobbishness.

parallel cuts from temple to lower jaw on either side of the face. Furthermore, these people borrowed the dyamu of the fama (Kouloubali, Dyara, etc.), just as certain servants in some of the French provinces are called by their master's name because they are members of the household bearing that name.

614 The elite troops (sofa, ton'-dyon', etc.) were armed with
701 axes (sukala) (2). Important chiefs also had axes, the insignia of
411

2. An instrument's name derived from suka, a variant of sua, meaning "to pierce." The men armed with axes were, in fact, assigned the special task of "making a breach" in the wall inclosing the settlement under attack.

command, sometimes made of precious metal, such as copper or silver. The axe carried by the fama was made of gold and enchased (3).

3. The chronicle relates that Tonmassa, after murdering Dékoro, carried off the golden axe, the symbol of supreme command.

The spear (tama) was often regarded as a weapon of distinction also. The ordinary warriors were armed with bows (kala) and arrows (bimye), the latter usually poisoned.

[177] Guns (marfa) gradually came into use, imported by native traders (Dyula). The chronicle claims that the first firearms were introduced among "the people of Ségou" in Mamari's time by an army from Kong and that these guns were of the blunderbuss type.

[304]

[End Plate 3]

Fig. 5. Bambara with his cheeks slashed in imitation of the tattooing characteristic of the slaves of the Kouloubali, Djenné region.

[142 854]

Fig. 6. Woman and child, Djenné Region.

Plate 3

142 Races]; Lieutenant Girard, Notes anthropométriques sur quelques Soudanais occidentaux [Anthropometric Notes on Some West Sudanese], 1909; Les races et les peuples de la terre [Races and Peoples of the Earth]; Chantre, Contribution à l'étude des races humaines du Soudan occidental [Contribution to the Study of the Human Races of the Western Sudan], 1918; Dr. Verneau, L'homme, races et coutumes [Man, Races and Customs], 1931.

From this study, a little hasty since the observations were made on very few subjects, we will retain the following features:

141 Without attaining the ultradolichocephaly of the Malinké, the Bambara is [5] characterized by his dolichocephaly (horizontal cephalic index 75.05; for Deniker 76.4) and his fairly considerable height (1.71 meters for the "aristocrats," a result of interbreeding with the Peul population, and 1.65 meters for the ordinary Bambara). Dr. Pales and Tassin de Saint-Péreuse give us figures which are considerably different and which are particularly interesting because their observations were made on 893 individuals. They give the horizontal cephalic index as 74.3, and the average height as 171.8.

Tauxier concluded in these terms: "It is a good Negro race, crossbred with several superior elements!"

142 Let us add to his description that the Bambara has a solid build, with no dissymmetry, a platyrrhinian nose, a pronouncedly [147] ogival skull, a skin whose scars have a keloidian tendency, and an [64] excellent natural defense against infection, although certain regions are particularly infested with goiter. They practice cranial deforma- [304] tion very little, differing in that from the Malinké and the Kassonké. Let us note, finally, that the Bambara have black wooly hair, but that some women have hair with red lights which is considered by 143 the natives as a magnificent trait. We shall not discuss the albinos with white skin and colorless hair, of whom the percentage is small.

R. Koerber, in Étude de la répartition des groupes sanguins chez quelques races d'A.O.F. [Study of the Distribution of Blood Groups in Several Races of French West Africa], out of a total of 1,066 Bambara found 3.9 percent of group AB; 25.7 percent of group A; 27.7 percent of group B, and 42.7 percent of group B, and 42.7 percent of group O. Group O then is dominant, but less frequent than for the Ouolof [Wolof], Malinké, Foula, and Sérère [Serer] races.

[826] 774 761 its seat in the prepuce and the clitoris, necessitating circumcision and excision). The body is conceived as being the support of all spiritual forces; each part is distinctly known [84] for its particular role. The body, like the spiritual principles, is bisexual; the boy [304] is feminine in his prepuce, the girl masculine in her clitoris, and it [831] is only after circumcision and excision that the man and woman can unite and realize the original fruitful twinship. On the metaphysical plane, there is identity between man, "seed of the world," and the cereal seed; the basic nutriments that are made up of the eight principal cereals are represented symbolically in men's clavicles. 775 761 Finally, death separates all of these elements composing the person. The dya remains in the water where it will become the ni of the new-born in the family of the deceased; the ni is caught by the family head and transported to the altar where it will animate the dya of the new-born; the téré becomes nyama, a dangerous and vengeful force; it is deposited on the pembele, where it rejoins the ancestral forces. The body is buried and belongs to the termites. At birth, all the spiritual forces are transmitted again, whole, "refreshed," and purified. One being replaces another until the final resurrection.

C. Ritual, Sacrifice, and Cults

782 To appeal to and influence the spiritual forces, the Bambara use prayer, offerings, and sacrifices. Oral rites are used everywhere and at any time. "They pray to the sky, the cardinal points, the spirits; they sacrifice on stones, on the ground, on trees, by water holes, just as on altars sheltered in the sanctuaries or situated in public or private places. Every circumcized adult, father of a family, owner of a home and cultivatable land, is a sacrificer, a capacity [531] emphasized by the red spot which sometimes is an ornament of the walls of the principal room in the man's residence." (1)

1. G. Dieterlen, Essai sur la religion bambara [Essay on Bambara Religion].

856
the blacksmith. The doll is given the name of the dead infant, the
[304 child carries it with him to the circumcision, and, when he marries,
583 he buries the doll with a piece of wood representing the wife of the deceased.

845 Twins are replicas of Faro, their presence is beneficial, and they are considered invulnerable.

826 The albino is supposed to be the issue of sexual relations held
833 in sunlight, a breach of taboo. He, too, is a new being. His wanzo
904 is so active that the circumciser must take great precautions before operating on it.

826 He is considered to be endowed with special powers which
782 make him a choice victim for the sacrifices offered to the spirit of the water.

553 To the children of blacksmiths, the name is given near the
326 paternal forge in the presence of all the artisans. An old man prepares seven little sticks, giving each the name of an ancestor. Three of these are drawn at random from the group, and the third gives the name of the baby. The head of the baby is rubbed with the axe Kongobwona, and his shaved hair is soaked in sacrificial blood.

553 In the Bamako region two chickens or a sheep are sacrificed
782 to celebrate the name-giving. The distribution of the meat is made according to established custom. If it is a chicken, the patriarch receives the head and the gizzard, while the wing and white meat go to the old woman who washed the baby during the first eight days. If it is a sheep, the patriarch receives [91] the ribs (because they are a bulwark, and the patriarch is the defender of the village) and the heart; the blacksmith receives the shoulder; the infant's family gets the head (so that the infant will go ahead), the back (symbol of prosperity), and the limbs (supports one wishes the new-born to have); the blood which runs on the ground is destined for the infant's protective ancestors. Then the family divides the raw meat with the heads of family, and the old woman thus receives her part indirectly.

c. Circumcision

881 A male infant is born, but he still keeps (because of the
304 primordial twinship) the prepuce as the physical support of the female
831 sex. He will only be freed of this by circumcision. It is this operation that definitively determines his sexual qualification and renders him fit to contract marriage.

1 [i.e., the surviving child of twins. -Analyst]

304
881
794 The society of n'Domo has the task of preparing children for circumcision; the wanzo of the child liberated by the operation goes in the mask of the n'Domo.

881
304 Formerly, circumcision took place between 18 and 20 years of age, and the circumcised had to bear arms the following year. At present, the children are circumcised between 8 and 16 years of [561] age, but all those of the same promotion are considered to belong to the same age class and are flani [sic] (twins) all their lives.

The ritual of circumcision has been described many times, in particular by Tauxier and G. Dieterlen. Therefore we will only report the essential phases.

The ceremony takes place during the dry season, in bountiful years after the harvest. The appearance of the constellation "Sigi-lolo" is watched for at a certain point in the sky, and when it is very brilliant, the date is fixed. The operation cannot take place except every three years.

The parents prepare for the ceremony long in advance: they make the child a bonnet of white cloth which they present to the Niger, and they make the signs representing the person of the child with earth from the river. Some days before the operation, the child enters into a period of seclusion; he is placed under the protection of the purifying light of Faro and receives gifts (cowries, food ....).

When the day arrives, his hair is shaved off. His mother washes his shaft with water in which an iron axe has been soaked, then has him eat a plate of rice.

The blacksmith prepares his knife, boloko kumba moru, which is enclosed in an iron sheath, this knife represents the circumcised and the prepuce which will be taken from him. The priest washes the handle and, symbolically, the penis. Then with coal or with millet paste he traces the blade with ritual designs symbolizing the three first circumcised men, the four first excised women, and the bird which is the avatar of the eight ancestral blacksmiths. Next, he ties the prepuce with a small cord (drawn on the middle of the blade) and places it on the pembelé. The cutting knife is hit with a small block of wood, and the blacksmith then traces the scarifications on the shaft. The circumcised bleed in a circle on the ground, in individual holes [92] dug between their legs. They thus deliver the wanzo to the impure earth, while the circumciser recites the prayers. Then they apply a dressing of bloody earth to the wound,

881 and the member is held up by a split millet stalk. The prepuces are
304 buried, and their white bonnets are put on the circumcised. The place of the operation is forbidden to women and to the non-circumcised who could take the liberated wanzo.

In the Bamako region the blood of the oldest is gathered in
[534] two new calabashes, which are later broken and the pieces used to make sistrums, sinzin.

881 After the ceremony, the children retire for three months under the direction of a priest of the Komo. During this period, when they receive a religious and technical education, they enter the village only to sleep in a special house and to repair the roofs of their teachers' huts.

[794] The night before the sixth day after the operation, they are initiated in the Komo. The next day they are led to the river where they wash their wound. Meals are taken together, followed by songs and dances, until they are healed. The last day, the sistrums, sticks, mats, and everything that has been in contact with the circumcised are put in a pile and burned. Each child jumps over the fire three times and runs home, without turning around, to lose his wanzo definitively. In the Bamako region the sistrums are preserved in the cabin of the village chief and will be used for the children of the following years. The bonnet is returned to the mother and will be preserved until death. The next day the child puts on his new clothes.

881 Let us note that for the circumcision of twins all the offerings
304 for the ceremony and the sacrifices must be doubled, and each child
826 will possess two sistrums. Finally, the albinos today are sent to the dispensary, because the blacksmiths are afraid to operate on them, their wanzo being particularly dangerous.

304 Circumcision may take place posthumously. The circumciser
766 then cuts the left ear of the body, since the wanzo freed by death would be dangerous to the living.

794 Generally, a sort of ceremony of confirmation of membership in the Komo takes place in the year following the circumcision.

d. Excision

881 The excision of the girls has a meaning equivalent to that
304 [83] of the circumcision of the boys. The operation frees them of the physical male factor residing in the clitoris.

physical male factor residing in the clitoris. The operation takes place, moreover, during the same period as the circumcision. It is carried out by the potteress, wife of the blacksmith, in full daylight before the assembled kin. During their seclusion the girls wear a white veil which plays the same role as the bonnet of the circumcised. Instead of the sistrum, the girls shake a gourd which contains eight millet seeds and cotton fibers which their fiancés have given them. A goat is sacrificed for the ceremony. The collected blood is given to the fiancé in honor of his ancestors who become those of the girl.

[93] On the last day of the ceremony the girls definitively rid themselves of their wanzo by jumping over a pyre composed of the clothes and scraps of the excisèd.

e. Marriage

It is only after having been circumcised or excised that young people may marry. The institution of marriage is regulated by a ritual which has often been described, particularly by Amar, Monteil, Tauxier, Aubert . . .

The marriage arrangements are made by the respective fa of the two betrothed, after the young people have been consulted. The request is officially made to the parents by an intermediary, a man of caste or a sènanku. It is accompanied by ritual gifts offered to the fa of the girl. In the Bougouni region the request is accompanied by ten kola nuts, because ten is a complete number that designates good events and future births. (Nine kola nuts are offered to present condolences, four as a sign of greeting. To send three nuts would be insulting, and 19 nuts, marking incompleteness, would be a sign of lack of confidence.) The first kola nuts to be offered are always wrapped in one or two karite leaves, symbol of life and of fecundity. If the ten kola nuts are accepted, it means that the father has opened the way to the marriage. The intermediary then make a second trip the following week, bringing a cock for sacrifice to the ancestors and ten more kola nuts; during a third trip he offers another cock and ten more kola nuts before the entire assembled family of the young girl, witnessing that the girl may meet her fiancé. In the course of the fourth trip, the intermediary leads the girl to the fiancé's family, where she will be confided to the wife of the head of the family who will undertake her education.

304 The Bambara decorate their faces and bodies with numerous
773 scarifications, with the aim of conferring on the wearer the qualities symbolized by the scars. By their influence on the character and temperament of an individual, they help him to come up to the ideal man. These marks are associated with the myth of the origin of agriculture They are eight small scars: two vertical ones at the root of the nose, three under each eye. They imitate the facial marks of the mythical being, half man, half animal, who taught men how to cultivate the soil. (1)

1. S. de Ganay, "On a form of cicatrisation among the Bambara," Man.

f. Arrangement of the Settlements

The Bambara village follows rules of development which al-
361 low a stranger to recognize the disposition of the huts immediately and to single out a chief's house, that of a blacksmith, or that of any other member of the society. In fact, the village is built to the north or east of the protective tree. To the south of the village,
[778] is the sacred wood, dwelling place of the chief of the spirits, where the religious ceremonies and the initiation rites take place. As more families come to live in the village, they build their huts around that of the chief, except to the east, for the chief must see the sun rise. The oldest son of the chief, his eventual successor, will have his own plot near his father's. The house of the Komo is situated outside of the village, to the south or west, hidden in a wood or a thicket. At the edge of the village is a round cabin, the house of the Nyama, in the middle is a square cabin with painted walls, house of the Gna (see the chapter on religion). In the center of the village, a cleared place around a doubalé serves for public meetings; the elders hold their councils under the branches of the doubalé.

764 [100] Finally, the cemetery of the free men is found outside the
554 village, to the west; that of captives and people of caste is to the south of the free men's cemetery.

326 Every village has its blacksmith, for he is life, and the vil-
600 lage could not subsist without him. Before the French conquest,

789 778 after death. This energy, this fluid, is the envoy, messenger, or emissary of hatred, vengeance, and justice, and it goes wherever it is sent by the will which is its director and master; it goes wrongly or rightly to bring misfortune, poverty, sickness, and death. The word gnâma is constantly heard from Bambara lips.

789 778 The song of young girls who have been excised begins with these words:

304 539 Bo n' yé, gnâma, o gnâma, bo n' yé!
Go away from me, gnâma, oh, gnâma, go away from me!
Dankoun bâ la
(i.e., Gnâma who dwell) at the great corner of land formed by two paths that cross.
Gnâma fambali, bo n' yé!
Gnama who kill, go away from me! (1)

1. Translation: "Go away from me, all kinds of gnâma, who dwell at the big dankoun (a corner of land formed by two paths that fork, intersect, or cross at the exit from the village)! Gnâma who kill, go away from me!"

789 778 The ears of those who consult sorcerers have had their fill of this word: Gnâma djougou bi é nofé. A malicious gnâma is chasing you, so avoid this and that, kill a goat, a chicken, or a dog, place a gift of cowrie shells, a kola nut, etc... in a certain place. Nonté i fa gnâma na ouli i la, otherwise the gnâma, the avenging force possessed by your father, will rise up against you.

Always, the word gnâma carries this meaning of a force, a power, a fluid that causes sickness, suffering, and death. The following proverb alone expresses much of its meaning: Ni warani-n-kala ko, /28/ ka fa, gnâma si dé t'o la. If the panther (a tyrant as wicked as a panther) says, "Let us kill him," we surely have no gnâma to set against him (no force or energy that we might set against him as a counterbalance to the force of his gnâma).

776 3. Gnéna Who Roam the Village and Its Environs

These gnéna like especially to sit where paths cross and somewhat resemble the gnâma, even though they are different (2). They

2. See what I said about the gnâma in the first chapter.

protect from spells and sorcery, give health and exorcise sickness, and it is not unusual in the morning at daybreak or in the evening just as the sun is about to disappear to see men and especially old women sprinkling a little clear water here and there at a crossing of paths. They are interceding for children and grandchildren or for a member of the family who is sick and lying on his mat, or they are imploring the gnéna to protect them from an enemy or an evil spell, or to shelter them from the gnâma.

776 782 Although these gnéna have no official priest, they nevertheless receive many gifts, and there is no circumcised man who does not feel obliged to make them his small offering, at one time or another. At crossings of paths one throws them preferably flour mixed with water, cowrie shells, milk, hatching eggs, ashes of herbs and plants, gruel, kola nuts, and sorghum cakes. At children's festivals the fodder is thrown to them in greater abundance; the cakes pile up at the entrance of the village (to the great joy of dogs and hens), and the ground is moistened with a light dew of blood (3). On the second day of the

776 782 304 262

3. All these offerings are made by the order of a sorcerer and are called saraka. See what I have said about the saraka in Chapter IV, Section I, "Belief in God."

drinking bout, which corresponds to the festival of the كبش (sheep), the soli girls, who are shortly to be excised, throw them the remains of the basi k'li in great handfuls without counting. Basi k'li is the name given to the repast provided for the whole village on this

776 day by the soli (those who are to be excised). It is a kind of semolina
782 (very fine couscous called basi) which is eaten with an /88/ extremely
304 spicy sauce of smoked fish. It is called basi k'li because, in order to
262 provide this repast, the little girls are obliged to run from door to door, clapping their hands, singing and begging (k'li).

Among the invisible wanderers, there is one which is strongly
776 reminiscent of our "werewolf." It is the souroukou, an imaginary
825 hyena, whose supposed existence has brought about a strange practice.
514 Every evening one sees groups of little boys and groups of little girls, turning aside a little into the bush: they all go in a band to take their last precautions and attend to the wants of nature -- union is strength even against the gnéna.

776 Many other gnéna are among this group that roams the village; they flutter in the b'lon, or entrance huts, they live in horrible filth, hung over doors, on the walls, and on the posts that support the terrace roofs, and the only hangings to be seen anywhere are eggshells, heads of millet, fruit pits, and seeds from the bush, which are offered to these friends as saraka. Nor are private huts without them, for the gnéna roll in the ashes of the hearth, snore on the mats, and take the air in the conari (1); there are some everywhere.

[415]

1. The conari is a baked earth receptacle used for water, beer, and cooking food.

Finally, there are gnéna or djiné who are powerful. Without mercy for their enemies, whom they abandon to all kinds of sorcery and evil spells, they are full of both attention and consideration for their friends. They can cause sickness, poverty, and other calamities to descend on a family, a village, or a whole region; but they can also side with them against a visible or invisible enemy; they can protect them, exorcise anything, and grant real blessings to each and all. The characteristic trait of the gnéna, in fact, is not that they can refrain from doing harm, but that they can also do good directly by performing a good act. Some choose to live in a rock, others prefer a knoll or a large tree near the village, and there are those who

778 /152/ at the foot of the tree under which the initiates shouted and
782 danced all night, they are shown the siri found by the djenfa tjéou (1)
562

1. Djenfa tjeou; those who run with heads of the Nama.

and the darotigi, or darotala (2). While these siri (3) are burned, the

2. Darotigi, or darotala: he who rings the bell and precedes the djenfa tjéou with a lantern.

[754]

3. The siri are sacred objects which initiates of siri, the souba, throw here and there in the environs of the village in order to cast evil spells and sorcery on persons to whom they wish harm. Every time the Nama is brought out 20 to 40 siri are found. These small amulets /sic/, made of a little of everything, including trouser buttons, hooks, and belt buckles, tremble and moan while the women watch them. I have been present several times at this performance but have never perceived these tremblings and moanings, doubtless because I am not a Negro.

women dance and sing the praises of the idol.

778 The boli have two days of rest a week, Monday and Thursday
782 (4). It is nevertheless permissible to sacrifice to them on these days,

[304]

4. They rest in the sense that a festival at which they preside, e.g., a circumcision, never takes place on those days.

4. Tattooing

●304 In the third or fourth month, the middle of a little girl's nose and her ear lobes (2) are pierced. This is also the time when every

2. A woman can hang from 10 to 12 rings from each ear lobe.

Bambara can be tattooed (3).

3. Some mothers wait longer before performing this operation on their infants.

The Bambara men wear a tattoo of three parallel lines that start at the temples and end under the chin. In addition to the three lines that furrow their cheeks, Bambara women wear a small horizontal line of one to two centimeters on each cheekbone (4). They make

4. This mark on the cheeks is especially common among the women of the Bani.

a star on the chin, and their foreheads are all furrowed with little knife cuts, so that from a distance one would say they are encircled by a crown.

In Bani country the women also tattoo their chests, their abdomens, and their lower abdomens, and on the biceps and forearm they wear three lines that meet in a rose shape at the joint. In the environs of Ségou this tattoo is less common, and the majority are satisfied to emphasize their breasts by encircling them with two or three rows of little dots in a semicircle, and they do this tattooing themselves.

The tattooing of the cheeks, the chest, the abdomen, and the lower abdomen among the women of Bani country is performed every

304 seven years and has a strictly religious character (5). The gnéna-

5. This ceremony takes place only once every seven years. The girls are always fairly big when their chests are tattooed.

sonnaba, surrounded by his council, the gouatigi, sacrifices to the dasiri; a hen is offered to the shades of the ancestors, the family boli are /173/ taken out of their dirty skins and sprinkled with blood, and all the village makes merry. People go in procession to the place 304 where the blacksmith tattooer is, and as long as the operation lasts 533 the women clap their hands, marking time for the blacksmith, who sings as he operates, and together they join in the chorus.

The tattoo, the chief distinctive mark of the people, is made 304 with a knife having one or two blades. The two-bladed knife cer- 413 tainly makes a tattoo which stands out more and has more detail, but it also requires more skill on the part of the operator, and, doubtless for this reason, it is relatively unusual.

314 At present a great many Bambara no longer wear the mark of their tribe on their cheeks. The Moslems have contributed greatly to the abolition of this painful practice. Before the arrival of Europeans, under the reigns of Ahmadou and Madani, very severe punishments were inflicted on anyone who tattooed himself or had his children tattooed. One should not think, however, that tattooing was ever a [187] strict and unqualified requirement; in this connection everything is entrusted to the decision of diviners and sorcerers, of djiné, or gnéna, genii, and especially of the family boli, which are consulted and sacrificed to in order to find out whether or not it is necessary to wear the marks of the tribe. Thus it is not unusual to find that some members of a family are tattooed and others are not, and that those who are not tattooed have their children tattooed, while the tattooed refrain from doing so. This ceremony is carried out every seven years, and the head of the family may be away when the blacksmith tattooer comes by, so that the sacrifices do not take place, and the tattooing of the children is put off until seven years later. When they have

304 grown up they are allowed complete freedom as to whether they undergo the operation or not. For fear of the pain and of letting a sigh or tears escape them and becoming the laughing stock of the whole village, many children of ten to fifteen years refuse (1).

1. Male children that are not tattooed usually have their ears pierced.

Bambara tattoos are simple and not at all ugly when well done. Although it disfigures some, leaving lumps as big as a thumb on their cheeks and chest, such an accident is /174/ extremely unusual, considering the number of those tattooed. They use no unclean substances to dry their wounds and make them swell, charcoal powder being the only medicine used in tattooing.

304 174 Although this practice is being lost around Ségou, and many families no longer want it for their children, it is nevertheless not on the verge of disappearing entirely and completely. To remove a religious practice from an entire people takes years, centuries, and if a famous sorcerer came and ordered it for those who dispense with it, they would undergo it at once.

Chapter 9

Circumcision in Bambara Country

1. The Importance of Circumcision

881 304 The important act in the life of the Bambara man and woman -- both sexes are mutilated -- is unquestionably circumcision. And whence did they get this custom? Some people settle the question with one word: "It is of Mohammedan origin." I refrain from being so categorical, for the Bambara have always rejected Islam, they have

88| 304 defended their gods with spear in hand, and I can find in their circumcision nothing which resembles the religion of the Prophet in the slightest. For the Bambara, circumcision is not only the seal of the tribe, it is also a second birth, the entrance into civil and religious life.

It is the occasion for four great festivals. On the second day of the festival which corresponds to the Moslem festival of the كبش (sheep), those about to be circumcised, who are given the special name of soli, offer to the to-n-déou, or members of the mutual aid society, fla-n-ton, a very fine couscous called basi. To obtain it, they have had to go begging and singing from door to door (kili), whence the name soli kili basi, which is given to this festival. Before going under the knife, all the soli make a vigil of arms. The soli kili basi is followed by the soli si (1), and six days later the da woro

1. Si, "spend the night."

is held. When the circumcised boys and excised girls are healed, the drums roll again, /176/ more drinking bouts are organized, and the boloko déou don bo, the coming out of the circumcised, takes place (1).

1. From boli, "hand," "arm" (veiled terms designating the sex organs); ko, "wash"; déou, plural of de, "child," "son"; don, "day"; bo, "to come out."

88| 857 During the days between the festival of Ramadan (2) and the

2. Under Moslem domination, the Bambara had to observe the festivals of Ramadan and of the كبش (sheep). They have become national festivals with sacrifices to the shades of ancestors and to the good fetishes. The observances do not include a single Moslem rite . . . .

881

1. Kéné, "public place," "court";
salo, "to stroke gently with the hand,"
"to make gestures."

One after the other the stars of the firmament go out, and only the morning star (sigi dolo) still shines, seeming to defy the dawn. Many "kouyô kouyô," shouted from a hundred throats, rise from the village, and the square is emptied. Everybody (I mean the women, for the squatting men keep on drinking and stirring the fire) rushes out of the village and forms a circle around the sacred karité tree. With 881 his back against the tree, separated from the crowd by a white cloth, ● 304 a blacksmith is kneeling rather than sitting and, razor in hand, awaiting the victims. He is calm, sure of himself, and not afraid; after all, it is quickly done. He grasps the foreskin, recites his formula as he spits, and the iron is raised, throws a gleam, and falls. A gunshot announces to the drinkers on the square that there is one more Bambara in the village, and while a woman storyteller /griotte/ applauds him, the owner of the god burns a few nayanka (2) leaves

2. A tree whose name in French
I do not know.

between two brands, and feverishly and eagerly goes to place the ashes on the kara, the altar dedicated to the shades of the ancestors (3), in the court of the one who was circumcised or excised.

3. This is the procedure wherever the Komo fetish is found. In the circle of Ségou a Komo is almost always the one appealed to, and if none is owned in the village, it is brought from a neighboring village for the occasion.

881 Limping, the circumcised go under the sacred trees where the dances in honor of the fetish are held, and that is where they stay

881 until they are completely healed; for it is not until evening, when the setting sun reddens the horizon and takes on its bloody hue that they re-enter the village. From this day on they wear a costume (all [292] yellow if they are Bambara) of trousers, a blouse, and on their heads a kind of handkerchief tied under the chin (4). They pass the time in

4. In some villages, instead of the yellow handkerchief the circumcised have a cap with two points. In Bani country the circumcised wear the blouse and handkerchief, or cap, and nothing more.

making mats, singing, striking together gourd disks strung on a stick, and especially in eating, "for they are being stuffed," and in sleeping. /181/

881 But in speaking of the boys, I forgot the little girls! They undress under the tree nearest to the sacred karite. Naked as a worm, ● 304 each one when her turn comes runs at top speed with her abdomen to the ground and throws herself into the arms of a woman, also of the blacksmith caste, who immediately cuts her. On a braided platter, [285 made of fine, pliable grass, the mother or her substitute receives the 415 bloody fragment which will be a grigri, a talisman or good-luck 389] charm for the house, and while the gunpowder speaks, the disabled girl, pretending not to be suffering at all from the loss of her clitoris, goes back to her place, and another replaces her.

881 The session ends with the last girl, and the crowd breaks out in a song of joy and triumph. The mother, the eldest sister, or a [482] serving woman wraps the excised girl in a big white cloth and carries her astride her back to the village to the hut which has been prepared for her (1). This carrying, so laughable in itself (they can walk, even

[621 346]

1. Each village is divided into quarters. The excised girls of each quarter have their hut in that quarter.

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762 has reached him"; -- "djinéou no do, the djiné are the cause of it";
761 -- "a fa gnâma do, it is his father's gnâma"; -- "boli y'a fa, a boli killed him."

Thus, all the sacrifices which are made on the occasion of a death are directed to the fetishes which are thought to be murderers, and if a deceased member of the family or of a family of strangers gets a slight trickle of blood, that is because on the word of a sorcerer he is guilty. When it is thought that the deceased was the victim of poured poison (dounkono) or korti (poison of the fetishes), thrown sorcery, there is recourse to the diviners and sorcerers to ascertain what invisible being must be soothed and what sacrifice should be uttered. If a gnâma is involved, a sacrifice to a fetish is often prescribed to ensure its protection, but to the gnâma itself a plain saraka, with or without bloodshed, is offered. These saraka are seldom made to the Supreme Being Alla; they are offered to the lesser djiné genii that run around the village and like to rest in the da-n-koun in among the gnâma.

3. Respects Paid to the Uncircumcised

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[304] Few honors are rendered at death to the uncircumcised and unexcised; such persons are not really Bambara, for they lack the tribal mark. The head of the village and his council ascertain that the death has occurred and, depending on the order received from the diviners, a sacrifice is offered or a saraka placed. The people of the village come to offer their condolences to the bereaved family, and when the grave has been dug, two or three youths bury the corpse without further ceremony.

The father wears mourning for a whole day, and for at least three days the mother grieves in her hut with a few women friends, her neighbors. A barbaric custom also decrees that if the deceased is an unweaned infant its big toe must be broken, in the presence of its mother, and many fathers do more. They mark it with a knife on the forehead, the nape of the neck, the shoulders, the arms; they cut the upper lip or the lobe of an ear. This procedure always makes a deep impression on a mother, especially if she has given birth when

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4: Henry--279 M-5 (ca. 1900) 1910 FA8 Bambara FA8

Tattoo worn by the women of Bani country.

Tattoo worn around the breasts by young girls of Ségou and made by themselves.